

THE FAMILY IN CRISIS

AN URGENT APPEAL
to the Global Church

The global church is facing a deepening family crisis, both within the body and outside of it.

It is a crisis that appears to be worsening. However, we see a tremendous opportunity for us to transform communities around the globe; by building families in our churches to be agents of change, impacting their communities for Christ.

We commend *Family Challenge*, our partner in family ministry development among the worldwide network of national alliances, for embarking on a global initiative that rallies the church body of each nation to come together to start national conversations on building healthy families as a way of life in the corporate body.

A key instrument of this initiative is a 3-part series of booklets. This is the first booklet that addresses the 'why' of every church investing in building healthy families.

It is my pleasure to invite you to join the rest of us in building a national family ministry movement in your nation.



Bishop Efraim Tendero, Secretary General
World Evangelical Alliance



WELCOME

We believe “healthy families make healthy churches!” Family is a key area of focus for the Transform World movement.

We are excited about this 3-part booklet series produced by Family Challenge to facilitate the on-going global conversations among Christian leaders on “why,” “what,” and “how” the Church can advance the Gospel by equipping and strengthening families.

I am glad to recommend you the first of the booklets in your hands. I hope you will catch the heart of God on the critical need to build healthy families. This booklet focuses on “why” we need family ministry around the world. Subsequent booklets will focus on “what” family ministry can look like and “how” our churches can develop this vital ministry.

I hope you will be encouraged and contribute to these endeavors in your sphere of influence. Join us as we step forward together to see a greater future of the global church with much stronger families in our midst.



Dr. Luis Bush, Transform World



INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION

Dear Church and Family Ministry Leaders,

The purpose of this booklet is to invite you to join us and other church leaders around the world to develop and engage in strategic, biblical ministry to families.

Family ministry is not simply helpful or beneficial, but necessary and essential to the work of the local church. God has created two fundamental institutions to advance His Gospel and build His Kingdom in the world—the church and the family. At the heart of this movement is uniting the church and the family in the Great Commission.

In the first days of creation, God created the human family to build His Kingdom and proclaim His glory:

- ▶ God's image is reflected in the unique creation of man and woman (Genesis 1:26).
- ▶ Marriage and family are pictures of God's covenant love and faithfulness (Ephesians 5:32).
- ▶ The family is God's primary plan for passing the faith to future generations (Psalm 78).
- ▶ Through the blessing of children, God's people are able to fill the earth with the worship and glory of God (Genesis 1:28).

Because God created the family as the foundation of human life it has been under continual attack from Satan and his demons. Whatever God loves, Satan hates. Whatever God desires to build, Satan seeks to tear down.

In this booklet we will explore four urgent reasons why our churches must have a plan to minister to families:

- ▶ Families are suffering.
- ▶ God's institution of the family is under spiritual and cultural attack.
- ▶ Justice and safety depend on strong marriages and families.
- ▶ God created families and churches to partner together to advance the Gospel.

Because of these realities, every local church needs a biblical strategy to build families, strengthen marriages, train parents, and connect the generations. When we strengthen families, we strengthen our churches.

Church leaders from around the world are increasingly sensing a call from God to develop Bible-driven ministry to families within their churches and communities. There is an urgent need to include family discipleship as an integral part of the church's overall Gospel mission. If we fail to engage in biblical ministry to families, the consequences for our churches and our nations may be dire. We want to invite you into this movement!

This booklet is the first in a three-part series written with the goal of accelerating a national family ministry initiative in nations all around the world. In these pages we will talk about the "Why" of family ministry. The remaining two booklets will focus on the "What" and the "How" of building and equipping families in our churches.

We have created this booklet to spark prayer, thought, and conversations surrounding the urgent call for the global Christian church to give strategic efforts to building, strengthening, and equipping families for Christ.

In the final section of the booklet, you will find specific next steps you can take to be a part of the conversation and join the movement.

With God's Love,



Prof. Ben Freudenburg serves as the Director of the Concordia Center for the Family and Professor in Family Studies at Concordia University Ann Arbor, MI.



Pastor Matthew Ling is the International Facilitator of Transform World Family Challenge, the 4/14 Window Movement, and the WEA Family Challenge of World Evangelical Alliance. He also chairs the Family Commission of National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia.



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Dr. Rob Rienow serves as the founder of Visionary Family Ministries, an international conference speaker, author, church planter, and pastor at Gospel Fellowship Church in Wheaton, IL.



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A photograph of a woman from behind, wearing a vibrant, multi-colored patterned shirt, holding a young child. They are standing in a lush garden with green plants and red flowers. The text 'FAMILIES ARE SUFFERING' is overlaid in white, bold, uppercase letters across the middle of the image.

FAMILIES ARE SUFFERING

Consider the families within your church and community. How many families do you know who are:

- ▶ Looking happy on the outside but behind closed doors the family is filled with anger and conflict?
- ▶ Experiencing abuse at home?
- ▶ Facing the pain of divorce?
- ▶ Engaging in premarital or extra-marital sexual relationships?
- ▶ Battling with addictions?
- ▶ Struggling with abandonment or betrayal from a spouse, parent, or sibling?
- ▶ Lacking basic skills for marriage, parenting, and managing finances?
- ▶ Delegating the spiritual training of their children to the church or school?
- ▶ Grieving as their teens and adult children are not following the Lord?

Each of us could identify studies that have been done in our own nations that demonstrate what we already know to be true—families all over the world are struggling. In every culture and community families are experiencing pain, brokenness, and sorrow.

In fact, as church leaders, we don't even need to look beyond the walls of our own homes. When we enter Christian ministry, we move to the front lines of the spiritual battle. How many marriages have collapsed under the weight of ministry? How many children have been neglected because their parents were too busy "serving Jesus?" Almost every church leader has a story about how life in ministry created conflict and pain at home. As a result, some pastors fail to strategically help marriages and families in their church because their own family is falling apart.

God has created the local church to face into this crisis with support and encouragement for families. When churches engage, families can increasingly grow, thrive, and impact their communities for Jesus. Also, when a local church strengthens families, those families in turn strengthen and bless the church.

Family ministry is urgently needed in your church because families are suffering.



FAMILIES ARE UNDER ATTACK

*See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. – **COLOSSIANS 2:8***

Family ministry is urgently needed in your church because families are under attack. God's institution of the family is under both spiritual and cultural assault.

Satan has been attacking marriages and families from the beginning. When sin entered the world, Satan drove a wedge between the first husband and wife. In their shame they retreated not just from God, but from each other (Genesis 3). God created human marriage as a picture of the Gospel and His love for us. Therefore, Satan seeks to destroy marriage itself, not just to bring us pain, but also to thwart the spread of the Gospel.

Satan then set his sights on Cain and Abel in order to stir up more sin, hatred, and brokenness. Jealousy and anger boiled over into murder and then banishment. Satan drove a wedge deep into the heart of the family, and he continues to do the same today.

Satan and the demons also wage their war against the family through "the spirit of the world." Culture itself can stand in opposition to God's plan for marriage, parenting, and family life.

These cultural attacks take many forms. In our various cultures:

- ▶ Couples are encouraged to live together before getting married.
- ▶ Pornography has been normalized.
- ▶ Homosexuality is not only encouraged but celebrated.
- ▶ The clear biblical distinctions between men and women are slowly being erased.
- ▶ Children are increasingly exposed to sexual content and activity, and at younger and younger ages.
- ▶ Marriage is portrayed as something to be delayed, avoided, or just temporary.
- ▶ Believers are forced to choose cultural values and rituals or Christian family life.
- ▶ Parents are encouraged to delegate the moral training of their children to school, culture, and media.

The world is filled with utter confusion about manhood, womanhood, marriage, sexuality, family, and parenting. Sadly, much of this cultural confusion and spiritual deception has crept into our churches as well.

God's purpose and plan for the family is slowly and steadily being replaced by a new morality which defines good as "whatever feels right." When Christians look to the Bible for God's vision and purpose for the family, they are dismissed as old-fashioned... or even worse, intolerant and hateful.

God created marriages and families to be united in Him, therefore we should not be surprised that Satan and his demons want to pull them apart.

Family ministry is urgently needed in your church because families are under relentless attack.



JUSTICE AND SAFETY DEPEND ON STRONG FAMILIES

Learn to do good, seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. – ISAIAH 1:17

Family ministry is urgently needed in your church because justice and safety depend on strong families.

Across the globe communities find themselves battling hunger, poverty, slavery, sexual exploitation, and all kinds of other injustices. The challenges are so great, and the needs are so many, it is hard to know where to begin. What can one church do to solve problems that even governments can't seem to fix?

One powerful way that our churches can offer real help is to embrace our biblical mission to strengthen marriages and families. If we help couples establish and maintain healthy marriages, we can have a significant impact on reducing poverty in the community.

When pastors invest in families, providing godly support for marriages, and Biblical wisdom for parenting, they increase the likelihood of children succeeding in school, learning responsibility, and preparing for healthy adulthood.

Although outside aid can be a significant and needed support, God calls His own people, within the Church, to love mercy, stand against injustice, care for the poor, and defend widows and orphans (Isa. 58:6-12). Imagine how our communities would be transformed if we viewed our churches as the primary means of strengthening families rather than our government agencies.

Pastors can begin with an intentional plan to encourage, train, and equip Christian families. They can begin to train young men and women with a biblical vision for family life before they enter into marriage. Our churches can intentionally disciple men and women and hold them accountable for their behavior at home, and do all in their power to protect those in danger from abuse. When the church strengthens and blesses families, it strengthens and blesses the entire community.

Family ministry is urgently needed in your church because justice and safety depend on strong families.



GOD CREATED FAMILIES TO ADVANCE THE GOSPEL

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. – DEUTERONOMY 6:5-7

Family ministry is urgently needed in your church because God created families to advance the Gospel. This is the ultimate reason and eternal purpose for family ministry!

In the Scripture above, known as *The Great Commandment*, God calls us to love Him and love His Word (verses 5-6). He then turns our attention to our families. He calls parents and grandparents to take the lead in passing faith to their children and grandchildren. He calls families to talk about His Word together at home.

In the Bible, Joshua caught this vision, and proclaimed to the people of Israel, “But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Sadly, the people did not follow Joshua’s call. After Joshua’s generation died, the Israelites forgot the Lord their God.

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. – Judges 2:10-11

How could this happen? How could faith in God be lost so quickly? This passage offers the tragic answer. They did not teach their own children and grandchildren about the Lord and the great things He had done for Israel.

It is here that the *Great Commission* begins. Jesus calls His followers to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:18). If God has entrusted children and grand-children to our care, our mission to “make disciples” begins with them. Sadly, all around the world parents too often delegate the spiritual training of their children to the church, the school, or the culture. Tragically, this has led to millions of young people leaving the church and their faith when they become adults.

God calls pastors in the local church to “*equip the saints for works of ministry*” (Ephesians 4:12). Where does ministry begin? Where does the Christian first live for Christ? At home! Parents need to be trained and equipped by the church for *how* to disciple their children. Married couples need to be trained and equipped by the church for *how* to live for Christ in their marriage.

Family ministry is not simply a helpful program. It is essential if we are to have a biblical model for our ministries. The early church understood the need for family ministry and multi-generational vision:

- ▶ Husbands were called and equipped to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25-26).
- ▶ Women were trained and encouraged to be loving wives and mothers (Titus 2:5).

- ▶ Children were taught to honor and obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3).
- ▶ Fathers were called to be spiritual leaders and shepherds for their children (Ephesians 6:4).
- ▶ Mothers and grand-mothers intentionally passed their faith to their children and grandchildren (2 Timothy 1:5).
- ▶ Young men and young women were taught to pursue sexual purity (1 Timothy 5:2, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).
- ▶ Single men and women were fully included in the multi-generational community of faith (1 Corinthians 7).
- ▶ Elders were not considered qualified to serve if they were not faithful husbands and spiritual leaders in their homes (Titus 1:5-9).

When it came to living out the Gospel, the New Testament Christians were “home-centered and church-supported” (Prof. Ben Freudenburg). Their faith began in their homes, but overflowed into their churches and communities, spreading out to the ends of the earth. The local church equipped these believers to shine for Christ in the world, beginning at home.

In many parts of the world today, we have flipped this around. We are “church-centered and home-supported.” In other words, we think about ministry being the programs that take place in the church building, and it is the job of our families to support those programs. One example of this is how many Christian parents now look to the programs of the church to teach their children about Jesus, rather than understanding and accepting God’s call on them as parents to take the lead in spiritually leading their children at home.

God has created two institutions to advance His Gospel in the world; the church and the family. They are unique creations of

God, with different roles and responsibilities, called to partner together for the cause of Christ.

Central to the mission that God has given each local church is to strengthen, train, and equip families to live for Christ. God calls families to pass down the faith through the generations. When these two institutions work together according to God's plan, His Kingdom grows as a result!

Family ministry is urgently needed in your church because God created families to advance the Gospel.



AN URGENT CALL

*He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. – **PSALM 78:5-7***

The health of our churches, communities, and nations ultimately rests on the health of our families. Satan knows this full well, which is why he attacks the family so ferociously.

God has created the family as the primary institution to advance the Gospel to the next generation. If the Christian Church is to fully embrace God's mission to reach the world for Christ, we must take seriously the calling God gives us in the Bible to equip and strengthen families.

This booklet has been prepared through the contributions of Christian leaders around the world. Our prayer is that the Lord will use it to challenge and encourage you to take active steps toward building a biblical ministry to families in your church. Why is family ministry needed today?

- ▶ Families are suffering.
- ▶ God's institution of the family is under spiritual and cultural attack.
- ▶ Justice and safety depend on strong families.
- ▶ God created families to advance the Gospel.

In these dark times, may we hold fast to God's Word and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, committing ourselves to building Christian families, strengthening marriages, training parents, and connecting the generations – for the glory of God and the advancing of His Kingdom!



DISCUSSION

Please consider and discuss these questions within your church or leadership team:

1. In what ways do you see families struggling in your church and community?
2. In what ways do you see spiritual and cultural attack against God's institution of the family?
3. In addition to the Scriptures included in this booklet, what other passages in the Bible connect the family with God's plan to reach the world?
4. In what ways are the Christian leaders in your church and community struggling in their own family life? What are the factors causing these struggles?



DISCUSSION

5. If the families in your church were strengthened in Christ, how would this impact your local church?

6. If the families in your community were to become stronger and healthier, how would this impact your community?

7. The local church is an essential part of God's plan to strengthen families. What is your local church currently doing to develop and lead a biblical family ministry?

8. What would be one step you could take in this next year to strengthen and equip families?



ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

What other questions about family ministry do you believe church leaders in your nation should be asking?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



NEXT STEP: YOUR VOICE IS NEEDED

This booklet was prepared with the deep conviction that God would use it to speak to many hearts and strengthen the resolve of church leaders in our nation to take bold steps to build healthy families as an integral part of the church's mission.

We believe the Holy Spirit may have impressed your heart on this matter and we invite you to join us for an upcoming gathering of Christian leaders to pray, study God's Word, and share our hearts with one another on this vital issue of family ministry.

Your voice in this meeting can make a difference. Be a part of this historic initiative! What a dream it would be to see the Christian community in our nation come together with a dynamic plan to strengthen families!

Join us as we partner together to strengthen God's church, equip families, and advance the Gospel.

To learn more and register for the leadership gathering, please contact the National Family Conversation Leader noted in the cover letter that accompanied this booklet.

This booklet is the first in a three-part series to accelerate a national family ministry initiative. The remaining two booklets will focus on the “What” and the “How” of building and equipping families in our churches. Thank you in advance for your partnership in the Gospel.

With God’s Love,

Ben Freudenburg
Matthew Ling
P.C. Mathew
Rob Rienow
Scott Turansky
Jonathan Ziman

P.S. For further reading as well as a bibliography of additional resources, we invite you to read “The Biblical Foundations for Building a Life-Changing Family Ministry,” available for download at www.transform-world.net/lens-1-seven-challenges.

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